

A
S E R M O N

On COLOS. i. 23.

Preached before

The SOCIETY in *Scotland* for propagating CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE,

At their ANNIVERSARY MEETING,

In the HIGH CHURCH of EDINBURGH,

ON *Monday, January 1. 1759,*

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By DANIEL MAQUEEN, D D

One of the Ministers of *Edinburgh.*

To which is annexed, the present State of
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S E R M O N

COLOS. i. 23.

—*And not moved away from the Hope of the Gospel.*

THEY who rightly consider the happy effects of our being established in the true faith of the gospel, will surely be inclined to guard against what tends to weaken or subvert it. May we, my Brethren, be thus disposed; and keep at a distance from their guilt and danger who are *moved away* from their Christian faith and hope, by the snares of the world, the love of sin, and *the craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive!*—You must be sensible, that I cannot at present speak of this subject in its full extent. All that is now intended, is, to make
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some observations upon it; after the illustration of which, a few reflections will be added suitable to the occasion of our meeting together at this time. And may thy Divine blessing, O God, now rest upon us, and thy grace be with all our Spirits!

ON this important subject then let it be observed in the *first* place, That it is usually by degrees that men who have been instructed in the principles of religion are moved away from the faith and hope of the gospel.

ONE step of defection naturally leads to another; that again to a third; and so in succession, till at length the understanding may be vitiated to a very high degree. There are many circumstances of different kinds which serve either to quicken, or to retard this progress. They, for instance, who have had the advantage of a wise and good education are not so easily induced to throw off their regard to the doctrines of our holy faith, as those are who never had more than a very imperfect and indistinct knowledge of them, and who were strangers even to the forms of religion in early



ly life. The ignorance in which such persons have been trained up, together with the weakness of their uncultivated understandings, lays them open to the sophistry and snares of infidelity.

BUT with regard to others, the entire corruption of their minds doth not so soon take place. The case here is similar to that of one's contracting a noxious disease, which is known to proceed very often from small and inconsiderable beginnings; but which in its gradual progress gathers strength, till it becomes an inveterate malady, and baffles all the efforts of human skill.

THE restraints of religion, however salutary in their own nature, appear to be uneasy restraints to those who would strongly wish to be indulged in some favourite passion or pursuit. They will not deny that it is irregular and sinful: But they are ingenious enough to deceive themselves with a false view of things, and with certain alleviations derived from the opinions and manners of those around them, and, 'it may be, of persons of rank and figure in the world.

world. The delusion is by degrees increased; the boundaries of their duty are passed over; their sensual appetites are indulged; their vicious passions are strengthened; the dictates of their consciences are violated, and the principles of religion will soon be disregarded: For when men are entered into a licentious course of life, in proportion to their progress in it will their aversion be increased to those practical truths which tend to obstruct and oppose their sinful pursuits, to throw a damp over their spirits, and to fill them with uneasy and perplexing thoughts.

THEY, who thus earnestly wish against the principles of religion, are surely in the high road to infidelity. Their minds are now opened to entertain every difficulty that may be raised concerning the external evidence, and every objection that may be offered against the most important truths of Divine revelation. To these difficulties and objections are they peculiarly attentive: And being collected and frequently reviewed they appear at length to their biassed minds to be

be of no small consequence. If they cannot themselves devise them, they can be easily furnished with them in an age wherein the rudest and most indecent assaults have been made on the Christian faith, and tenets subversive of all religion have been avowed without shame, and without restraint. An unworthy abuse this, by the way, of an estimable and noble privilege.

Now if such reading and such tenets have that influence upon minds so vitiated which is readily to be expected, even the most irrational and uncomfortable principles of scepticism or infidelity may soon be received, and be, at least for some time, cordially entertained; so that, in the language of an antient Philosopher concerning irreligious persons, “What is really deplorable ignorance may be considered by them as “profound wisdom.”

AFFECTATION and self-conceit are now indulged; a vain pride of understanding is assumed; what is either the reverse of common sense, or else, is unintelligibly intricate, is dignified with the name of philosophy;
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things serious and sacred are treated with profane irreverence; and while those who are averse from their principles have but a small share of their regard, they who associate with them, or who seem inclined to do so, obtain much of their good-will; as they are highly pleased with having numbers on their side, who will feed each others vanity, and mutually encourage each other in those opinions concerning which some misgiving doubts and fears are ready to arise in their minds from time to time.—It is of no great importance, whether the result of all is, that they adhere to any system of irreligious tenets, or profess to remain in a state of scepticism or utter uncertainty about all principles of religion whatsoever.

PITIOUS state indeed, to which the human mind is thus reduced. Can we fail to observe, that those very persons who extol the dignity of the human nature do, in truth, debase it by the notions they espouse? They strenuously oppose the doctrine of its corruption or degeneracy; and they afford a flagrant proof of its truth. Very lofty encomiums are made on the
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strength of reason, and on its sufficiency to bring men to knowledge and happiness: And can there be a plainer evidence of its weakness and insufficiency than what is furnished by the present subject? That the intelligent creatures of God should be so estranged from him! That the light of reason and religion should be so unworthily obscured! The boasted powers of the mind so shamefully perverted! And that such a chaos of darkness and disorder should be introduced into the soul of man! The scene is truly piteous, and its prospects dismal. May none of us, my brethren, be involved in its guilt and horror! But,

IN the *second* place, let it be observed, That it is a dangerous thing for men to imagine that they are but little if at all accountable for any mistakes, of what kind soever, into which they may fall in their inquiries concerning religion; because, as they must give or withhold their assent according to the evidence that is before them, it may be their unhappiness, will they say, but cannot be their guilt, that they turn aside from the

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faith

faith of the gospel. As too many are inclined to think in this manner, and as the pretext is somewhat plausible at first sight, I would remark a few things concerning it :

And, instead of metaphysical speculations on this subject, let the appeal be made to experience, and to facts which we have frequent occasion to observe. Do not these clearly shew, that men's opinions are affected by many other things besides the strength or the weakness of those reasons by which any proposition or assertion is confirmed or refuted? Do we not often see that the same degree of evidence hath not the same influence on different persons? And that the proof of some important facts, which to an impartial man appears to be full and satisfying, is thought to be extremely defective by one who is averse from believing them? How favourably do men judge of what is done by a friend? But how severely do they judge in the case of an enemy? How faintly will they disapprove of some things in their own conduct, which they will strongly condemn in the conduct of others? Are they not
prone

prone to give their assent upon a very slender evidence to that which is agreeable to their wishes and hopes, which soothes any prevailing passion, which promotes some favourite design, and is highly conducive to their worldly interest? But, in an opposite case, how unwilling are they to listen to conviction? How uneasy when the truth is laid open to them? How ready to devise objections against the reasons on which it is supported, and to encourage every doubt that may arise? So that, if it cannot be rejected as improbable, it may at least be considered as uncertain. In short, when the bias of interest and shame, of prejudice, pride and passion, is fixed on the side of error, in the business of civil life, the effect on the understanding and judgment is great and apparent.

If all this be admitted, as it must be by those who have any knowledge of themselves and of the world, it may well be presumed, that this wrong bias will have a like effect upon the mind in the concerns of religion. Its sacred truths are obviously of such importance as to demand our frequent and serious attention.

attention. But will this be given by those who dislike them, and who live in opposition to them? And can the light that shines around be of service to us, if we shut our eyes against it? Some facts of the greatest consequence may be attested, and some truths of Divine revelation confirmed, in the fullest manner; but if this clear evidence is but little attended to, it can have no effect upon us: And when it is considered by those who are strongly prejudiced against it, and have a rooted aversion to those doctrines which it tends to establish, they will endeavour all they can to oppose it, and to obstruct its influence on their minds.

To this, perhaps, they will be further prompted by vanity and self-conceit. Men of this turn will reckon it below them to hold on in the beaten path that is open to all, and are inclined to strike out some new tracks to themselves: The effect of which is, that they are soon bewildered in their views, and are apt to stumble at every step of their intricate progress. But in these dark and embarrassed paths, they who are animated by
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the same spirit are disposed to follow them. Thus may vanity, or an eager desire of being distinguished from others, (how little soever to one's real honour) add its influence, in an opposition to the truths of the gospel, to that which is derived from a stated aversion to its important doctrines and holy precepts. And tho' some irreligious persons may not be much influenced by the former of these two bad principles, yet the latter seems to operate powerfully on the minds of them all.

IF there were nothing in the truths of religion which checked the licentious desires of men, and opposed a profligate course of life, they would be received by them as readily as many other truths are which have no such evidence to support them. But as they are not speculative, but practical truths, the case is very different. That the wise and righteous Governour of the world will render to every one according to his works, is, for instance, an important truth that draws after it a long train of consequences, and that opens a scene of remorse, distress and fear to
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the workers of iniquity. Therefore would they wish to raise objections against it, to cherish doubts about it, and, if possible, finally to exclude it from their thoughts.

As this aversion of theirs from the sacred doctrines of religion is manifested in many different ways, so it may be fairly deduced even from the manner of reasoning of Deistical writers concerning them. The great and leading facts which confirm the truths of our holy faith are plainly established upon an evidence superior to that which gains our assent without hesitation in all the transactions of civil life, and by which its most momentous concerns are determined. But when this evidence is applied to matters of religion, doubts will be raised about its validity; and, with regard to these facts, and the doctrines connected with them, it will be reckoned a very shrewd question to ask, How can these things be? And, if this question cannot be fully answered, the whole subject, according to them, is to be considered as embarrassed, and unworthy of belief. For ought I know, more than one half of all the
objections

objections against Divine truths are reducible to this single head. And thus those very persons who are ready to acknowledge, (and their ignorance and vanity would be conspicuous, if they did not acknowledge) that they daily see many events and effects for which they cannot distinctly account, will presume to urge that objection in their reasonings about religion, which holds equally against things that they see and feel, and assent to from day to day. They who cannot pretend to explain what relates to themselves, to the mechanism of their bodies, to the operations of their minds, and to the daily course of nature which passes before their eyes, will yet dare to be impiously forward and arrogant in their questions, their speculations and conclusions concerning the perfections, the purposes, and operations of the Creator and Lord of the universe, whose glory is unsearchable, whose wisdom is infinite, and whose works and ways far surpass our comprehension.

HERE then is one effect and proof, among many others, of that strong partiality
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and aversion of which I speak: And can it fail to be connected with great guilt, when reason is so unworthily perverted, the light of divine knowledge so obscured and opposed, and when the corrupt passions of the heart produce such abuse and such resistance? *This is the condemnation, saith our blessed Redeemer, that light is come into the world, and that men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* You see then what was the chief source of infidelity at that time: And to the same source, together with that of vain affectation, have the principles of irreligion been traced up by the wisest Philosophers in the heathen world, and by some of great name in modern times who were themselves noted for a very free spirit of inquiry. Antient irreligion indeed and modern infidelity do, in many respects, very nearly resemble each other.—As I have insisted so long on this head, I shall not detain you with a large illustration of those which are to follow: For I would have it observed,

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IN the *third* place, That a disbelief of Divine revelation is to be considered as the cause of a course of actions which may involve us in the greatest guilt and ruin.

* SOME things of the highest moment and which nearly concern our present and our everlasting interest are plainly set before us in the gospel. It furnishes us with some striking ideas relative to the great plan of the Divine administration, and discloses a scheme of heavenly wisdom and grace for our recovery out of a state of guilt and death: It gives a full revelation of mercy to sinful creatures on their cordial compliance with its important call; and it directs and enjoins us to hearken to his voice *whom the father hath sent, and sealed*, the son of God appearing in our nature as our almighty Saviour, whose character is at the same time venerable and amiable. But disbelief or infidelity shuts the eyes and the hearts of men against these sacred truths and injunctions. The plan of redeeming

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grace

* A few paragraphs under this and the following head are now added to the Sermon.

grace is by it opposed: *The counsel of God* for their salvation is rejected: The Divine Saviour is treated, O impious thought! as if he had been an unworthy impostor; and the great objects of hope and fear that are presented to us in the gospel are disregarded and despised.

AND upon what grounds do they proceed in this career of infidelity! Do they pretend to absolute certainty in the case? Is there any one of a sound understanding who will presume to affirm, that he hath seriously and impartially considered the system of religious truths in the gospel, and the external evidence of it, and that he is fully convinced in his own mind, that the whole is false, and is certain that it is *a cunningly devised fable*? If he do not, and cannot so affirm, why doth he act as if he had thus considered, and were thus persuaded? Is it enough for him to say, that there are some doctrines of the Christian religion which he doth not fully understand, and others which are confessedly mysterious and inexplicable? when it is evident, that what relates to the nature, the perfections, the works and counsels of God

God must necessarily be mysterious to us, in one degree or other. But if to this be added some uncertain talk about the sufficiency of natural religion, together with exceptions against several passages in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and some general reasoning against the validity of the external evidence of Christianity, (which reasoning indeed tends to destroy all moral evidence whatsoever) we have the sum of that plea which can be offered in behalf of the conduct of Infidels. And if it be a weak one, as it is apparently, how dismal is their state?

LET us suppose, that any human law, highly conducive to the interest of the community, had been sufficiently promulgated, and that it had a natural tendency to extricate the state out of some perplexing circumstances in which it had been long involved, and to bestow great advantages on all the subjects; but yet, that some persons, not from a pitiable weakness, but from a perverse turn of mind, were disposed to call in question the necessity and reasonableness of it, to cavil at some expressions
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in it, and to start difficulties about the manner in which it was said to have been promulgated: Let us suppose, that, in consequence of all this, they not only refused to receive it, and to obey its injunctions, but set themselves to oppose it, and to counteract its wise and good purposes; and is it not manifest, that the heavy punishment of such flagrant disobedience would be justly inflicted upon them? The case is plain; the application is obvious; and the threatened judgment of God against those who renounce the gospel and reject that salvation which the Redeemer hath revealed and procured, is great and awful. But,

IN the *fourth* place, let it be observed, that they, who throw off the doctrines of revealed religion, are exposed to a confusion, a perplexity and instability of sentiment in things of the highest concern.

SOME who do so may perhaps think this a matter of small importance: And no wonder it should be thus thought of by all those who add gross ignorance to great perverseness, and who would be hard put to it,
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if it were required of them to sum up the evidence for Christianity which they reject as insufficient, and to give a distinct account of that system of doctrines which they disregard and renounce. But to those of a superior class, and indeed to all who make any right use of reason, it must appear to be a very natural and a very interesting question, If the scheme of doctrines and duties contained in the Christian religion is to be laid aside, what is to be substituted in its room? Shall it be the plan of antient idolatry with all its appendages? No, it will be said: This was the offspring of superstition; and it was cherished by the invention of poets, and the devices of priests and politicians? Shall it then be the doctrines of antient philosophy? Some assistance, it will be answered, may be derived from these: Tho' it must be owned, that, as there were different sects of philosophy of old, very different tenets were espoused by them, and that their authority is of no great weight. (Some of the most distinguished character among them, have indeed been treated as

fools

fools and enthusiasts, by a late eminent patron of infidelity.) Shall any think of having recourse to that religion which prevails in so great a part of the eastern world? No surely, it will be replied: We despise the dreams and dictates of that fanatical impostor in whom the Mahometans believe; and would refer ourselves and others to the light of nature and reason as fully sufficient for our direction in all matters of religion.

BUT hath it not been found by experience, and in all ages of the world, to be altogether insufficient for this purpose? Must it not be acknowledged, that the established religion of the least civilized nations differed heretofore but little from that of the most civilized, I mean the Greeks and Romans? The acuteness of genius of the former and the wise policy of the latter have been, and will be long celebrated, together with their wonderful progress in useful arts, and in all the branches of science: But the boasted wisdom of both was extremely defective on the most important of all subjects, that of religion. It hath been often shewn,
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that human reason when most improved was perplexed with doubts, and did not afford a full and certain knowledge of many things which it highly imports us to know : And it is perfectly plain, that the generality of mankind have neither leisure nor capacity for the investigation of truths that are to be discovered by a long train of reasoning. They surely need a more simple method of instruction, better adapted to their capacities, and their circumstances in life. To leave every man to his own direction, and to the conclusions of his own reason how weak and vitiated soever, would be a scheme for the introduction of diffusive ignorance, wickedness and barbarity. And, in order to avoid manifold and endless disorders, it would be necessary for the civil magistrate to become the Director of religious belief and practice, as well as the Legislator in matters of morality.

WHAT I have now hinted concerning the effects of laying aside the Christian faith, is, in some measure, confirmed by the writings of those who have of late most extolled the sufficiency of the light of nature. How much

much flippery and defultory reasoning do we meet with there, even about the essential truths and duties of religion? So that very little, if any thing at all, is ascertained concerning them. Are we to take up with the uncomfortable and gloomy scheme of a God without a providence? Or, if we admit a Divine providence and government, is this to be considered as confined to nations, and to their public interests, without extending to individuals, and to their actions and concerns? And are we to remain in utter uncertainty about the immortality of the soul, and a future state of retribution? Yet this, I think, is the sum of all that is to be collected from some voluminous tracts but lately published concerning *the first philosophy*. And in the dissertations and essays on the law of nature that are there presented to us we shall find, that what is asserted in general to be plain, sufficient and perfect, is, in the detail, so obscure, insufficient and imperfect, as to be incapable of giving a sure direction in some of the most important duties of religion and morality ; nay, so very obscure

secure as to lead us into principles subversive of these duties in many instances: As is the case too in certain treatises written professedly upon *morality*, but which, in truth, are avowedly favourable to some things grossly *immoral*, and tend to cherish some of the meanest and basest passions of a corrupt heart.—Such are the proofs that are given in *our age* of the boasted sufficiency of human reason: These are the schemes that are presented to us by men highly conceited of their own abilities: And such are the effects of disregarding the wise, and amiable plan of divine truths in the gospel. But I would observe,

In the *last* place, That they who reject it have no solid grounds of peace and hope to the souls.

It is certain, that they cannot have any who are inclined to entertain endless doubts concerning truths of the highest evidence, and utmost importance; and who act as if their reason had been given them for no other purpose but to disquiet and perplex them, and to be continually and painfully exerted

in embarrassing what is plain and darkening what is in itself perspicuous. But as to those who profess to believe the great principles of religion, who consider themselves as the intelligent creatures of God, accountable to him for all their conduct, who reflect on their guilt and demerit, who attend to the voice of conscience, and look forward to a future state of rewards and punishments;—Where can they find peace and rest to their souls, if they depart from the blissful doctrines of divine grace in the gospel of Christ? How can they bear the thought of exchanging these for the uncertain deductions of reason, and the wavering conjectures of a doubtful mind, hesitating and perplexed about matters of the greatest, of everlasting moment? Doth it not seem to be a very plain, I had almost said, a self-evident truth, that it belongs to him alone, who is the supreme Ruler of the World, to settle the plan, according to which, the great and wise ends of his government should be promoted, and at the same time, the gracious purposes of his fatherly

therly compassion should be accomplished? Is this a subject about which, by the mere light of reason, we can presume to speak with certainty? Doth not the very attempt to do so argue an absurd pride of understanding? And doth not a divine revelation then appear to be necessary, in order to dispel our doubts and fears, to give solid grounds of peace and hope, and to open to us the prospect of everlasting felicity? Should not this revelation be ardently desired? And ought it not to be thankfully received?—It will be so by the wise, the humble, and the penitent; by those who have a right knowledge of the divine government and law, an affecting sense of their own guilt and unworthiness, and of their urgent need of his abundant mercy; and who look forward beyond the short limits of this present state to a future world and an approaching eternity. In the plan of divine mercy thro' Christ Jesus, and in this alone, will they find rest to their souls. May it be ever amiable in our eyes! And may we be made partakers of that inward
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peace and reviving hope of which it hath laid the sure foundation!

UPON the whole then, my brethren, *Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ who hath caused the day spring from on high to visit us, to give light to them that sate in darkness, and in the shadow of death.* May this heavenly light shine into our minds; and may every thing that would obstruct its entrance be removed! O let us not be strangers to serious thoughts on religion and the concerns of our souls: But in our frequent attention to these, and to our circumstances of guilt and depravity, may we be still more sensible of our need of all that mercy and grace which our Divine Saviour reveals and bestows!

To his blissful doctrines let us steadily adhere, which give a new evidence to the truths, and add a new strength to the obligations of natural religion; which open to guilty creatures the most pleasing views of forgiveness and peace; which lead forward our thoughts with hope to an unseen and eternal state; and which, in consequence of
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all this manifestation of divine grace, would attract us by the most ingenuous motives, and determine us by the most powerful incitements to the love and obedience of our God and Redeemer. As men thoroughly persuaded of the aggravated guilt and manifold misery that are connected with a departure from God, and *a being moved away from the faith and hope of the gospel*, let us guard against an approach to this dismal state. Let us frequently and impartially reflect on the extensive and persuasive evidence by which the Christian revelation is confirmed; and while we duly consider the excellency of its doctrines, of its *exceeding great and precious promises*, and of its noble and delightful hopes, let us be desirous to feel the sacred influence of these upon our hearts. Then indeed would we be in the way of the divine blessing: Then indeed might we hope for *the light of his countenance*, and to be *filled with all peace and joy in believing thro' the power of the Holy Ghost*.

LET it be remembered too, that if we are established in the faith of the gospel, we must earnestly

earnestly wish and pray that its important interests may be advanced, and be inclined to contribute our assistance and endeavours, how weak soever, in order to this end; according to the talents with which we are intrusted, the stations of life in which we are placed, and the various opportunities that may be afforded to us in the course of divine providence. Thus were those worthy men inclined who formed the design of erecting a *Society for propagating Christian knowledge*, and whose attention was chiefly directed to the piteous state of the northren parts of this country.

SINCE the time of the erection of this Society, many liberal contributions have been made for the enlargement of its funds, which, it is well known, are managed with great care and fidelity. And it is to be hoped, that, by the assistance of generous and publick-spirited persons, the Society will be farther enabled to carry on the noble purposes which they have had all along in their view, and to extend their thoughts to the Indians in America, where they have
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now a mission, and have much hope of considerable success. Thus indeed would they, whom God hath blessed with affluence, *honour him with their substance*: Thus would they shew their regard to the interests of religion, and to the happiness of their brethren: And thus would they *lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come*.

MUST not every humane and truly benevolent man be strongly affected when he thinks attentively on the pitiable condition of so great numbers of our countrymen in the remote Highlands of Scotland, who are so much exposed as a prey to savage ignorance, or else to the artifice of those who would corrupt their minds with the principles, and inflame their hearts with the spirit of Popery? The connection betwixt these and a spirit of sedition and rebellion is but too apparent, and hath been too often felt. It is not long since we had a melancholy proof of this, in the late rebellion, which spread such confusion and devastation amongst us. O that it may be the last effort

fort of mean and absurd principles, and of a tyrannic superstition against the light of reason and religion, against liberty and sacred truth

Is it not, my brethren, to be earnestly wished, that those very men, who would otherwise be dangerous enemies to our civil and religious liberties, should, by proper care, be made happy instruments for the defence of both? And may not this be reasonably expected from the introduction of religious knowledge, and of the arts of civilized life amongst them? That they may be made most useful members of society, and may considerably increase our national strength, is evident, among other instances, from their late gallant behaviour in America, against the cruel oppressors of our colonies, and the avowed enemies of our religion, commerce, and liberties. And shall the children and friends of those brave men who have fallen in defence of their country be disregarded; and of those too, who survive, and are animated with the same spirit? On the contrary, let a peculiar regard and
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the highest instance of kindness be shewn to them in early life, that they also, in their turn, may hereafter give like proofs of fortitude and fidelity, and that to these may be added an attachment to the principles of loyalty and religion.

To conclude, May the interests of *this Society* flourish! May those imployed by them be diligent and zealous in the discharge of their duty! And may their labours be followed with the divine blessing!—May we, my brethren, be established in the faith and love of the gospel! Let us be excited to prize and improve the inestimable privileges which it bestows, *to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*, and to promote the interests of his kingdom among men: And may the name of our glorious Redeemer be great from the rising to the setting sun! *May all nations be blessed in him! And let all nations call him blessed.* Amen.

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THE HISTORY OF THE
CITY OF LONDON
FROM THE FOUNDATION
TO THE PRESENT
TIME
BY
JOHN STOW
1618



